

EXHIBIT 228

OBJECTIVE TROY

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AND THE RISE OF THE DRONE

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First Edition

HE HAD A BEAUTIFUL TONGUE

For two Arab freshmen who had bonded during their first months at Colorado State, the trouble started, oddly enough, over the Super Bowl. Ghassan Khan, from Saudi Arabia, wanted to watch the Buffalo Bills face off against the New York Giants. Anwar al-Awlaki, from Yemen, objected.

"I told him, 'I want to watch the Super Bowl,'" Khan said. "He said it would be better even to stare at the wall than to watch. He didn't like the beer ads and the cheerleaders."

He watched despite Awlaki's protests, and it was a good game, Khan recalled: The Giants beat the Bills 20-19, the only Super Bowl to be decided by a single point. But Khan was bemused; his friend had been absurdly transformed over the monthlong Christmas break. Gone was the fun-loving character who had led him on various escapades in their first semester of college. In his place was a puritanical scold, a kid acting like a censorious old man, suddenly embracing a starkly conservative brand of Islam.

The two nineteen-year-olds had become fast friends after arriving in Fort Collins in the fall of 1990. They were both smokers and engineering students, the only two Arabic speakers in their stone-walled dormitory, and they connected while huddled outside with their cigarettes in the gathering autumn cold. There was a third Muslim in Allison Hall, a tall Indian student named Hozaifa, and the trio often hung out together, testing their new freedom in the time-honored style of college freshmen. For young men from conservative Muslim backgrounds, the liberties were especially heady.

None of the three was especially religious, and they went to parties and did some drinking. Because he looked older, Hozaifa was assigned to try to buy alcohol; Khan remembered that Anwar had urged Hozaifa to ask for a sweet coconut-flavored liquor, Malibu Rum, that Anwar said he had tried the summer before.

"Of the three of us, he was the fun guy," recalled Khan, now vice president of an investment bank in Riyadh. Anwar had an interest in politics and occasionally talked about the plight of the Palestinians. But he also had a hookah, or water pipe for smoking tobacco, and he was more comfortable than the other two talking to girls. One night at 2 a.m., Anwar, who had bought a car, suddenly said, "Let's go to Boulder!" Despite some grumbling from the others, the three teens made the hourlong drive and discovered—surprise!—that everything was closed. They found a twenty-four-hour Denny's, ate and hung around, and drove back to Fort Collins at 8 a.m., Khan said.

Khan and Awlaki grew so close that they decided to move off campus together for second semester, and they agreed to move into an apartment with an older Yemeni who had recently finished a master's degree in economics and knew Anwar's father. But because Khan headed home for the winter break, while Anwar stayed in Colorado, they were separated for several weeks. When Khan returned, he was stunned by what had happened to his roommate.

Awlaki, clean-shaven the first semester, had begun to grow a beard, often a clue to a Muslim man's growing religiosity. It turned out that he had fallen in with a group of Islamic proselytizers in Fort Collins from Tablighi Jamaat, which translates as "society for spreading the faith," a global movement encouraging piety and devotion. He had come under the particular influence of an older student from Egypt working on a master's in civil engineering who had the beard and somber style of a religious conservative.

And something else had happened during the break: on January 17, ten days before the Super Bowl, the United States had begun bombing Iraq in the opening air raids of Desert Storm. When Anwar saw CNN's Peter Arnett reporting live from Baghdad as the bombs began falling, he called his father at home in Sanaa, where it was 4 a.m., and woke him to tell him the news. Baghdad held special historical and symbolic significance for any Arab, Nasser al-Awlaki said,

and his son's angry reaction to the bombing was the first time he had criticized the United States.

There was some irony in the fact that the student who had spent the holidays in Saudi Arabia had maintained his freewheeling American lifestyle, while the student who stayed in Colorado had embraced Islam. But the pattern of a Muslim visitor to the United States seeking solace in the clarity of religion when faced with the disorienting temptations and excesses of an American campus was well established. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the chief planner of the 9/11 attacks, had spent several years in North Carolina in the 1980s, earning an engineering degree at North Carolina A&T in Greensboro while spending his free time with the bearded religious students whom other Muslims on campus mocked as "the mullahs." The Egyptian scholar and Muslim Brotherhood leader known as the father of radical, anti-Western Islamism, Sayyid Qutb, had a famously allergic reaction to American materialism and sexual openness. While in the United States on a fellowship for teachers in 1948–49, Qutb (pronounced KOO-tub) spent time in New York, Washington, DC, California, and Greeley, Colorado, just a forty-minute drive from Fort Collins. It was a dry town of ten thousand people, known as "the city of churches," hardly Sodom or Gomorrah. Nothing captures Qutb's horror at what he considered American licentiousness better than his description of a church dance, of all things, overseen by a pastor: "The dance floor was lit with red and yellow and blue lights, and with a few white lamps. And they danced to the tunes of the gramophone, and the dance floor was replete with tapping feet, enticing legs, arms wrapped around waists, lips pressed to lips, and chests pressed to chests. The atmosphere was full of desire."

The atmosphere was not the only thing "full of desire," one is tempted to add, upon reading this 1951 Qutb essay, entitled "The America I Have Seen." And it gets worse, or perhaps better:

The American girl is well acquainted with her body's seductive capacity. She knows it lies in the face, and in expressive eyes, and thirsty lips. She knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks, and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs and she shows

all this and does not hide it. She knows it lies in clothes: in bright colors that awaken primal sensations, and in designs that reveal the temptations of the body—and in American girls these are sometimes live, screaming temptations! Then she adds to all this the fetching laugh, the naked looks, and the bold moves, and she does not ignore this for one moment or forget it!

Qutb's reverie is by no means exclusive to Islam; there are plenty of analogical anecdotes in the history of Christian fundamentalism and Orthodox Judaism. But apart from its entertainment value, the essay sheds a fascinating light on Awlaki, for whom sex would become a dangerous trap and Qutb would become a critical influence.

The tension between Khan and his devout roommate grew, coming to a head not long after the Super Bowl confrontation. During one cold spell, Khan decided not to go to Friday prayers, a standard ritual even for many casually observant Muslims. Awlaki could not believe it. "He kept knocking on my door. I said, 'You go, I'm not going.' He said, 'What do you mean you're not going?'"

Awlaki told Khan he didn't want the television—Khan's television—turned on when he was home, a condition Khan grudgingly accepted. But one day a few weeks later, Awlaki came home to find Khan watching a movie on cable—nothing racy, Khan said, though he didn't remember which film. Awlaki flew into a rage. "He came into the living room and threw the TV on the floor and smashed it," Khan recalled. Khan told Awlaki, "This isn't working," and moved out. After that, when they met on campus, Awlaki was polite but unrepentant.

"He didn't apologize—not at all," Khan said. "I saw him a couple of weeks later, and he said, 'You left some books.' He brought them by. I ended up sleeping on a couch with friends the rest of the semester."

Yemen is a conservative Muslim country, but Awlaki did not bring this prudish intolerance from Sanaa to Fort Collins. It smacks of the callow certainty of the recent convert. And there was another factor, as Ghassan Khan pointed out. In both Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Khan said, social contacts can be quite stratified by class and religious views. As a teenager in Sanaa, Awlaki would have been unlikely to

spend much time with religious hard-liners. In America, a very diverse Muslim minority was thrown together by circumstances. "I grew up in Saudi Arabia, and I never met people like the Tablighi," Khan said. "If Anwar had stayed in Yemen, I don't think he would have changed." Nasser al-Awlaki shared that view. He told a visitor years later of his son's embrace of piety, "What happened, happened in America."

Nasser al-Awlaki was conventionally religious, family members say; to grow up as a Muslim in Yemen is a bit like growing up as a Baptist in the rural American South—the fundamentals of belief, scriptural knowledge, spiritual vocabulary, and worship come with the territory. But along with his first cousin, Saleh bin Fareed al-Awlaki, Nasser had attended the British-run Aden College, a private high school on the Arabian Sea that was no hotbed of Islamism. And unlike Qutb, he was overjoyed with what he found in America after arriving on a Fulbright scholarship in 1966. He was the classic aspiring Third World technocrat, coming to America in search of education and taking his new skills and broadened worldview home to try to help his struggling country. In that mission he succeeded spectacularly, serving as minister of agriculture and in high-level university posts, and eventually dispatching two of his three sons, first Anwar and then Ammar, to America with the expectation that they would follow a similar path. Religion was very much a sideshow in the family's life, and Nasser was concerned that it might derail his sons, family members say. When the middle son, Omar, began to visit the mosque in Sanaa too often for his father's liking, Nasser actually prohibited him from going there. "He said, 'If you want to pray, pray at home and don't congregate with others,'" said the youngest brother, Ammar. "He was afraid he'd be politically inclined toward the Muslim Brotherhood," which had a branch in Yemen, Ammar recalled.

Anwar's American citizenship was an accident of his father's education. He was born on April 22, 1971, in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where his father was a graduate student in agricultural science at New Mexico State University. Four months later, the family moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, where Nasser worked on his PhD at the University of Nebraska. Finally the family relocated to St. Paul, Minnesota, moving into a house near Nasser's teaching job at the

College of Agriculture of the University of Minnesota. Anwar went to Chelsea Heights Elementary School near Como Park in St. Paul, and his father described him as "a cute little boy who enjoyed himself very much in school and outside." His parents had parties with other graduate students from around the world and went on vacation to northern Minnesota's lake country in the summers, swimming, fishing, and hiking. "Anwar had a beautiful childhood in America," his father said. Nasser and Saleha's second child, a girl, was also born in the United States.

But work in Yemen called, and the family arrived back in Sanaa on the last day of 1977. Anwar was enrolled in Sanaa's only private school, Azal Modern School, where he quickly caught up, though his English was better than his Arabic. He stayed in the school, favored by Yemen's elite, until graduation in 1989, a kid who carried piles of books on vacation and took a particular interest in history. Islam was part of the curriculum at Azal, as at every school in Yemen, and Anwar prayed and fasted during Ramadan like everyone else, his father said. He showed no special interest in religion and in his high school days never spoke of becoming an imam. In fact, his brother Ammar remembers their mother repeatedly putting a prayer rug in Anwar's suitcase before he left for Colorado State and Anwar repeatedly taking it out; his attitude seemed to be, Ammar said, "I'm going to America and I won't need this."

But Anwar, like his schoolmates, was excited by the jihad of the mujahedeen, the holy warriors fighting for Islam—with the help of the United States—against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. The concept of jihad, malleable and disputed within modern Islam, would become central to Anwar al-Awlaki's evolution, and here it makes its first notable appearance. For boys of their generation, said Walid al-Saqaf, a neighbor of the Awlaki family in Sanaa in the 1980s, the guerrilla war to oust the godless Soviets was an inspiring, heroic cause. "There was constant talk of the heroes who were leaving Yemen to join the fight and become martyrs and go to paradise," recalled Saqaf, now an Internet activist in Yemen. In the Awlakis' neighborhood, families would regularly gather to watch the latest videotapes brought by young men returning from the war. "I recall Anwar as a skinny teenager with brains," Saqaf said.

Students who did especially well in school were permitted to opt

out of military service and instead spend a year teaching. For Anwar, who was no athlete, this escape from the drudgery and physical toll of army service held great appeal. So for a year after high school he taught in an elementary school in Dhela'a, an hour's drive from Sanaa. A decade later, applying to start a doctoral program in education, he recalled the stint with pleasure: "That was my first exposure to the field of teaching, and I loved it."

By all accounts Nasser was a loving and supportive father, but he did not hesitate to direct his son's education. He thought Anwar should get an engineering education and specialize in hydrology and water resources, a topic Nasser had himself written about and a critical need in Yemen, where groundwater sources have been dwindling for decades. Nasser spoke with friends at the US Agency for International Development in Sanaa, who advised him to consider Colorado State, which had a strong hydrology program. According to Nasser, his USAID friends also advised him to have Anwar apply for an American government scholarship reserved for foreigners and say he was Yemeni, which was not untrue—he grew up with dual citizenship. (Much later, Anwar wrote: "My father at the time was a Minister of Agriculture and the Americans were happy to make some exceptions for him.") The day after he landed in Chicago on June 5, 1990, however, Anwar applied for a Social Security card and listed his place of birth as Sanaa, presumably a deliberate misstatement to protect his scholarship offer. Some twelve years later, after the country had been unimaginably altered and Awlaki had taken an unexpected path, government officials would discover and pursue the old teenage falsehood.

At some point after the blowup with Ghassan Khan, Awlaki seems to have settled into a less obstreperous, more reasonable style. But his new devotion to Islam lasted. He became an active member of Colorado State's Muslim Student Association, serving for two years as association president and chairman of *dawah*, or outreach, at the little mosque at the edge of campus, said Yusuf Siddiqui, a friend and fellow MSA activist. Siddiqui said that in the wide range of Muslim students Awlaki would have been considered a moderate, somewhere between the most rigid conservatives and the libertines who shrugged off bans on drinking and sex. He was elected MSA

president in a race against a Saudi student who was far stricter. "I remember Anwar saying, 'He would want your mom to cover her face. I'm not like that,'" Siddiqui said.

But in the pre-9/11 era, few university officials paid much attention to the internal politics of the Muslim minority on campus, and the most conservative contingent expressed quite extreme social and political views. "I felt like the MSA was a bunch of radicals and fundamentalists," said a Muslim woman, born and raised in Kuwait, who studied at Colorado State when Awlaki was there but didn't know him. She recalled an aggressive male student with a big beard declaring in a panel discussion that Muslims who lived like most American students on campus "were going to hell." The woman ended up settling in the United States but said she was no longer a practicing Muslim.

Siddiqui said that Awlaki's flawless American English sometimes made fellow students forget that his adolescence, and the shaping of his personality, had taken place in the very foreign setting of Yemen. "If you made some pop culture reference, he might not recognize it," said Siddiqui, who had grown up in Colorado. Once, on a picnic jaunt to Big Thompson Canyon about a half hour's drive from campus, Anwar astonished his American and Americanized friends by climbing a nearby mountain barefoot. "He just said, 'That's how we do it in Yemen,'" Siddiqui recalled. Sometimes it was hard to know whether Awlaki's behavior reflected his upbringing in Yemen or his newfound religiosity. Once, when a female American student stopped by the MSA to ask for help with math homework, "He said to me in a low tone of voice, 'Why don't you do it?'" Siddiqui said. The budding ladies' man that Khan had observed in the early months of freshman year now, after his embrace of Islamic piety, felt uncomfortable being alone with a female student.

As an MSA activist, Awlaki was becoming more overtly political, and naturally his attention fell on the Afghan jihad that had been so powerful a part of his milieu as a teenager in Sanaa, where he had spent many hours watching videotapes of the jihad and hearing the tales told by Yemeni men returning from battle. In the winter break of his sophomore year, in late 1991, he took off for Afghanistan, by then legendary among Muslims around the world as

the place where a band of devout warriors of Allah had defeated a superpower. After the Gulf War, he wrote later, in a possibly embellished account published in *Inspire* magazine, "I started taking my religion more seriously and I took the step of traveling to Afghanistan to fight." The notion of a skinny, pampered American college student taking up arms in a brutal guerrilla war may seem like a stretch, and it is quite possible that Awlaki was glorifying a bit of jihad tourism. The Soviet Army had pulled out nearly two years earlier. But it was not implausible that he aspired to join the fight: as he prepared to leave, the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul still held power, and various rival factions of mujahedeen were still battling government forces, though the combat was scattered and nothing like it was at the height of the war.

Not surprisingly, the experience appears to have been a letdown. Anwar's younger brother, Ammar, later asked him about his Afghanistan trip. Anwar said he had not fought because there was so much snow and it was so cold. According to Ammar, Anwar had responded disgustedly, "We did nothing." Ammar added, "When Anwar says we did nothing, it means that Anwar, who used every minute of his day, was frustrated." Undoubtedly anticipating resistance, Anwar did not tell his father about the Afghan trip until after it had occurred, Nasser al-Awlaki said. "I actually only knew about that trip after he returned to the US, and I was glad he had returned to continue his studies," Nasser said. "I think he stayed only a few weeks and it was after the war ended there, when Americans were traveling there freely."

In the version published later in *Inspire*, Anwar himself suggested that he had found the experience so moving that he was prepared to drop out of Colorado State and join the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, but his plans were overtaken by events. "I spent a winter there," he wrote, returning to Colorado "with the intention of finishing up in the US and leaving to Afghanistan for good. My plan was to travel back in the summer." But in the spring of 1992, the last Soviet-backed leader, Najibullah, resigned: "Kabul was opened by the mujahedeen and I saw that the war was over and ended up staying in the US." But if Afghanistan had been a frigid disappointment, he didn't let on. He wore a distinctive Afghan hat all over campus, a please-ask-me-about-it affectation that spoke of a young man trying on an

identity. He started quoting Abdullah Azzam, a prominent Palestinian scholar who provided theological justification for the Afghan jihad and was a mentor to Osama bin Laden.

Given Awlaki's later career, his belated visit to the most famous and celebrated modern jihad takes on special meaning, even if he never got near combat. It is also an opportunity to set aside the indelible coloring of 9/11 and recall that the stirring saga of the Afghan mujahedeen, with which Awlaki had grown up and which inspired his college travel, was an American-funded, American-backed, American-celebrated affair. Each year of his presidency, Ronald Reagan had lavished praise on the grizzled, bearded Islamists he called "freedom fighters," and he had backed their David-and-Goliath battle with billions in covert aid via the CIA. "To watch the courageous Afghan freedom fighters battle modern arsenals with simple handheld weapons is an inspiration to those who love freedom," he wrote in one of his annual Afghanistan Day proclamations. "Their courage teaches us a great lesson—that there are things in this world worth defending." Like the CIA strategists and American politicians whose vision would be hailed in the book and movie *Charlie Wilson's War*, Awlaki was inspired by the victory of the mujahedeen. But while the Americans credited the outcome to the Stinger missile and an open congressional checkbook, Awlaki attributed the triumph to Allah.

Awlaki's extended absence in the wilds of Afghanistan had left him way behind in his studies. Ghassan Khan remembers him turning up in a fluid dynamics class late in the spring semester and pleading with his former roommate to share his notes from the class. "He said, 'I really need to get an A on the final, because I got a zero on everything else,'" Khan said. Not long after that, Awlaki learned that he had lost his US government scholarship, a move he later suggested might have been punishment for his growing Islamic activism. But by his own admission, and the recollection of some classmates, he had missed many classes because of both his travels and his extracurricular interests, so his suggestion of political martyrdom is not especially convincing. "Shortly after my scholarship was terminated, I enquired for the reason behind such a drastic step," he wrote. "The answer I got was that my grades were dipping too low. It is true that my focus had now shifted away from school and my grades suffered

because of my travel to Afghanistan and my role as head of the Muslim Student Association on campus." His Colorado State transcript confirms the deteriorating grades: despite borrowing Khan's notes, he got an F in that fluid dynamics course, and his grade point average for the whole 1991–92 school year was a meager 1.0, a D average. His father said he thought the scholarship had ended because of USAID budget cuts, which is possible, though it is easy to imagine his embarrassed son offering his father that explanation rather than owning up to his woeful performance. Nasser confirmed that he had paid his son's tuition and expenses for his last two years at Colorado State.

But if the door to academic stardom was closing, another door was opening. The Islamic Center of Fort Collins met in a modest, one-story brick house in a residential neighborhood adjoining the Colorado State campus; it had been a church until Muslim students and professors, who had met in borrowed rooms since the 1960s, bought it for \$149,000 in 1980 and finally had a permanent home for worship, study, and charitable activities. By the early 1990s, said Moin Siddiqui, a retired professor of statistics and mosque leader, Friday midday prayers, or *jummah*, was drawing 150 men and 30 women from diverse backgrounds. "You'd have a bunch of Pakistanis, a bunch of Malaysians, a bunch of Saudis, a bunch of Libyans. They studied hydrology, veterinary medicine, civil engineering, statistics," he said. Without the budget to pay a full-time imam, students and professors took turns preaching the Friday sermon. It was a comfortable, low-pressure setting for an ambitious young man to try his hand at preaching, and Awlaki took advantage of it. He soon found that he had a knack for it.

If he could boast of no deep religious training, he knew much of the Koran and the hadith, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. He spoke fluent English, and he had a light touch. "He was very knowledgeable," said Mumtaz Hussain, a Pakistani immigrant active in the mosque for two decades. "He was an excellent person—very nice, dedicated to religion." Awlaki expressed no anti-American sentiments, said Hussain, whose son served in the National Guard. "This is our motherland now. People would not tolerate sermons of that kind," he said.

His choice of courses seems to reflect a growing excitement about preaching. In the summer term in 1992, he broke out of his strict

engineering curriculum and took a course on public speaking, as well as introductory classes in literature and philosophy. In the spring of 1993 he signed up for "The Literature of Social Protest," and in his final term in the summer of 1994 he took "Studies in Persuasion," earning an A in both of those courses. As the months passed and his reputation at the mosque flourished, Anwar began to imagine an alternative to the path his father had set out for him, the lockstep sequence from an American engineering degree to a post in Yemen working on water supplies.

Many years later, on his blog, Awlaki would say that Thomas Gradgrind, Charles Dickens's notoriously utilitarian headmaster in *Hard Times*, reminded him of "some Muslim parents who are programmed to think that only medicine or engineering are worthy professions for their children." It sounded like a personal gripe. Anwar managed to pull up his grades considerably, earning all A's and B's in his senior year. By taking courses all four summers, he managed to graduate in 1994 with a bachelor's of science in civil engineering and an overall GPA of 2.41, a low B-minus. His father naturally wanted him to use the degree, and he took an entry-level job at an engineering consulting company in Denver. "That would be the topic at the lunch table here in Sanaa when Mom and Dad would talk about it," Anwar's young brother Ammar remembered. "They were happy about it, thrilled about it, when he was a trainee." But he quit after a matter of weeks, to his father's dismay. "I discussed the issue with him, and I tried to encourage him to continue his career as a professional engineer, because that kind of career will benefit the people of Yemen after he decides to return to Yemen," Nasser said. But by then Anwar had managed to get a part-time job as an imam at the Denver Islamic Society, and it was obvious that his heart was in preaching, not hydrology.

Days after receiving his degree in August 1994, Anwar flew to Abu Dhabi for a wedding—his own. The Awlaki family was modern and westernized in many respects, but in this case they opted for tradition. The match was an arranged affair in which Anwar and his bride, Gihan Mohsen Baker, the daughter of his father's second cousin, appear to have had limited say. Like many well-off people from southern Yemen, the bride's family had left the country after a Marxist regime seized power in the south in the late 1960s, seeking

their fortune in fast-developing cities like Abu Dhabi in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Saleh bin Fareed al-Awlaki, Anwar's wealthy uncle and a respected sheikh who had earned a fortune while living in the Gulf, helped play matchmaker. (Bin Fareed was Nasser's first cousin and thus technically Anwar's first cousin once removed, but Anwar called him uncle.) Anwar's parents "asked me if I would speak to my cousin and to his daughter and her mother," Bin Fareed recalled. "They asked, 'Is he the right man?' We said, 'Yes, he's the perfect man. Plus, he's our blood.'" Anwar was twenty-three, a beanpole with an unruly beard at six-foot-one and 135 pounds; Gihan was nineteen. They settled in Denver, and their first child, a boy they named Abdulrahman Anwar al-Awlaki, was born there on an August afternoon a year later.

By most accounts, Awlaki's preaching in the early years was unobjectionable even to those American Muslims who were especially wary of hints of radicalism, which could attract unwanted attention from the authorities or alienate non-Muslims. There were mentions of the plight of the Palestinians and criticism of sanctions on Iraq for depriving ordinary Iraqis of medicine and food, an issue to which Awlaki would often return in later years. The tenor of Awlaki's message was unambiguously conservative in terms of social values. Like many an evangelical Christian pastor, Awlaki preached against vice and sin, lauded marriage and family values, and parsed the scripture, winning fans across a range of generations. As an American citizen in his mid-twenties, equally at home in Arabic and American-accented English, Awlaki was a rarity. Most imams at American mosques were older immigrants who spoke English with a heavy accent or not at all and had little understanding of American youth culture. Awlaki could meet young Muslims on their own turf and sympathize with their awkward position between two cultures, one at home, the other at school. But he impressed Arab immigrant parents and grandparents, too, as a bright young man who could discuss spiritual matters or practical problems in Arabic. "He had a beautiful tongue," said one of the pillars of the Denver mosque, a Palestinian American in his sixties. "He had a nice voice. He had earned the knowledge he needed."

But the same elder recalled a painful dispute at the end of Awlaki's time at the mosque, known as Al Noor, or "the light." A Saudi student at the University of Denver told the older man that he had

decided, with Awlaki's encouragement, to travel to Chechnya to join the jihad against the Russians. The elder thought the Saudi's plan was ill-advised and confronted Awlaki after Friday prayers. He told Awlaki that the young man should not go on jihad without the permission of his parents, citing the hadith, the sayings of the Prophet. Their argument grew louder, with a small group of worshippers pausing to watch. "My way was *dawah*," or inviting people to accept Islam and its teachings, he said. "His way was *jihadi*." As their dispute escalated, the elder said, "I told him, 'Don't talk to my people about jihad.' He left two weeks later."

Years later, said the elder, who was reluctant to be quoted by name about controversial topics, he felt vindicated when the 9/11 attacks showed what loose talk of jihad could lead to. "This jihad situation started long ago. It wasn't dealt with then, and it's grown and grown," he said. "Some of these leaders are brainwashing the young people." He said he counseled young Muslims studying in the United States to stay out of politics: "I tell them, 'You're here to get your education and go back and serve your people. That's your jihad.'"

Indeed, the concept of jihad, literally "struggle" in Arabic, is as flexible and disputed as "freedom" in American political discourse. Jihad can be the struggle within oneself to do the right thing, the struggle to raise your children as honest and caring people, or the nonviolent struggle against injustice in the world. But its most common meaning in everyday parlance is, of course, that of an armed struggle for Islam. In official American government pronouncements, as well as American public sympathies, the Chechen jihad against the often-brutal Russian military sometimes got implicit or open sympathy. In the months before Awlaki's dispute with the Al Noor elder, in 1996, the State Department regularly condemned Russian military atrocities in Chechnya and the relentless bombing of Grozny, capital of the autonomous republic in Russia's mountainous south. Given Awlaki's own adventure visiting Afghanistan, it is easy to imagine him offering religious sanction to a Saudi student a few years younger to follow his dream. The Saudi student at the Denver mosque did follow Awlaki's advice, went to join the fight—and died in Chechnya in 1999, the elder said.

Awlaki's reputation for preaching in Denver got him an invitation to become the head imam at another mosque, Al Ribat al-Islami, in San Diego, a city whose sunny climate and seaside setting must have been hard to resist. Al Ribat means "retreat" or "fortress," and the mosque had been founded by Saudi and other Gulf students who felt that the city's main mosque, the Islamic Center of San Diego, known as Abu Bakr, was too liberal. Al Ribat occupied a handsome stucco building with blue-green tile under a towering palm tree, and Anwar and Gihan and their growing family—Abdulrahman now had a younger sister, Mariam—moved into a modest house next door. Now, at the early age of twenty-five, he was in charge of his own mosque. Again, his reviews were excellent, and he seemed to take to the idyllic Southern California lifestyle.

"He lit up when he was with the youth," said Jamal Ali, forty, an airport driver. He played soccer with younger children and took teenagers paintballing—a common outing for church youth groups, too, without the association with training for jihad that it later took on from a terrorism prosecution in Virginia. The young imam found himself counseling people far older than he was, and he was still finding his way, Ali said. "I saw him evolving in trying to understand where he fit into Islam," he said. Awlaki read lots of books on leadership; he later let his younger brother, Ammar, help himself, and Ammar found a well-thumbed copy of Stephen R. Covey's 1989 mega-bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, in his collection.

Lincoln W. Higgle III, an art dealer in his late fifties who lived across quiet Saranac Street, found Awlaki to be an engaging and thoughtful neighbor who apologized about the parking problems that came with the flood of Friday worshippers. On Thursdays, Higgle remembered, Awlaki liked to go fishing for albacore, and sometimes he would bring over a sample of the catch, deliciously prepared by his wife. The Awlakis' toddler son and daughter would play on Higgle's floor, chasing his pet macaw, while the men compared notes on their travels. "I remember he was very partial to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul," Higgle said. He detected no hint of hostility toward or discomfort with non-Muslims like himself.

Awlaki's family also stayed in close touch. His father spent six months in San Diego in 1997, enjoying time with his grandchildren.

And when a scheme to invest in gold and minerals caught his son's eye—not the first or last time Anwar would be attracted by a supposedly lucrative investment—Nasser loaned him some \$20,000. (He “lost everything,” Nasser later recalled with a rueful laugh.)

Anwar invited his brother, Ammar, now seventeen, to spend the summer of 1998 with him in California, and the teenager had a memorable time. On the sidewalk outside the mosque after Friday prayers, he sold jars of famed Yemeni honey for a total of \$700, a neat profit of \$600 over what he had paid at home. Alongside the honey, he sold cassettes of his brother's lectures on the lives of the prophets of Islam. The bigger San Diego mosque, Abu Bakr, had offered Anwar a job, which he turned down, Ammar said. But the discussions led to a regular series of lectures by Anwar at Abu Bakr, and those talks became the basis of the lectures that a few years later, recorded professionally, would make Anwar famous among English-speaking Muslims.

“He was very popular, charismatic,” Ammar recalled, “hanging out with the younger guys more than older guys. That was the start of the Internet—e-mail, AOL, all that stuff. He had a computer in his office at the mosque, and that's where he spent most of the time. The rest of the time we'd go mountain climbing, camping. We had some fun camping—the two of us and guys from the mosque.” Ammar said he grew sick of eating fish (“It was fish all the time—salad with fish, rice with fish”), but he had fond memories of accompanying his brother on early-morning trips on a big fishing boat with about fifty people aboard, catching yellowfin tuna and barracuda. They would clean their catch in the kitchen, and Anwar's wife would complain about the mess, Ammar said.

Anwar, clearly buoyed by his own success, encouraged his younger brother to resist family pressure in his choice of a career. “He would tell me, you know, ‘Be a lawyer, be an artist, be an author—don't be an engineer or a doctor, because you can find an engineer or doctor to do that for you.’ He always insisted that, ‘Ammar, don't choose what Dad and Mom choose for you. Choose what you think you can find yourself in.’”

To most everyone he knew, Awlaki's life seemed to be going remarkably well. But there were darker currents in both Anwar's personal life and his professional life during his San Diego years. Twice,

in 1996 and 1997, the young husband and father was arrested for soliciting undercover police officers posing as prostitutes on a notorious strip not far from the mosque, and once he was charged for loitering near a school. In 1999, alarmed by his contacts with suspected militants, the FBI opened an investigation, closing the inquiry with no charges the following year. Those episodes would remain unknown even to some close acquaintances at the time. Years later, after 9/11, those earlier arrests and suspicious contacts would get new scrutiny, as investigators tried to understand whether Awlaki might have had a secret life far beyond his dalliances with streetwalkers.

For now, however, his growing renown drew speaking invitations from mosques around the country. In February 2000, with a few associates, Awlaki incorporated a company in Nevada to sell his sermons and lectures on CD, calling the company Al Fahm Inc., for the Arabic word for “intellect” or “insight.” His father, who had visited him in San Diego and seen his success at the mosque and beyond, had given up on trying to steer him back to engineering. But Nasser al-Awlaki still worried about Anwar's career choice—and especially about what it would mean if he chose to return to Yemen. “I told him, If you come back to Yemen, you'll be just another imam, and there are thousands of imams in Yemen,” Dr. Awlaki recalled. “The best thing for you, my son, is really to have another career.” Nasser al-Awlaki used his connections with Sanaa University to get Anwar a scholarship to do a master's degree in educational leadership at San Diego State. Then he persuaded him to go on to complete a PhD and helped arrange for the government to support that, too. By his father's account, Anwar decided to leave his job at the San Diego mosque to begin a doctoral program elsewhere. He was accepted by the University of California at Santa Barbara, but he heard that the program at George Washington University in the nation's capital was better. The fees were far beyond what his government scholarship would pay, so George Washington agreed to waive all fees if he would take on a part-time role as the university's Muslim chaplain, giving occasional religious classes and counseling students. Even with his tuition covered, however, his \$800-a-month scholarship from the Yemeni government was not enough to support his family, so he would have to find a job.

Then he got a recruiting call from a far bigger mosque that served

the thriving, diverse Muslim community right outside the nation's capital. Dar Al-Hijrah—the name means “land of migration,” aptly capturing the jumble of nationalities and languages represented at Friday prayers—was a powerhouse.

Later the mosque would have to fend off hyperventilating accusations of guilt by association with terrorists, notably Awlaki himself, and would be given a scurrilous label in the right-wing media, “the 9/11 mosque.” Given that subsequent history, the motive of Dar Al-Hijrah leaders when they offered Awlaki a job as imam at the end of 2000 was more than a little ironic: they hired him specifically because they were worried about the dangers of radicalization. They feared that Dar Al-Hijrah, in suburban Falls Church, Virginia, was losing young people to a nearby, more overtly militant storefront mosque, one whose underground feel was underscored by its name: Dar al Arqam, for the owner of the safe house in Mecca where the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers met in secret. “The mosque’s objective in hiring Anwar was, they had had a series of imams who did not speak English and were not engaged with the youth,” said Johari Abdul Malik, a longtime Muslim chaplain at Howard University who became director of outreach for Dar Al-Hijrah in 2002. At Dar al Arqam, a charismatic bioscientist named Ali al-Timimi was drawing young people with a hard line: that voting was *haram*—forbidden by Islamic law—because it elevated man’s law over God’s law, and that serving in the American military was outlawed because US forces might fight against Muslims. Dar Al-Hijrah, though its leaders might express strong anti-Israel views and oppose social equality for women, took a far more accommodating stance toward American life. For some young people with an assertive approach to their faith, the mosque’s leaders were far too accommodating.

“They weren’t offering the edginess that young cats need,” said Abdul Malik, an African American convert to Islam who spent years counseling college students. “Young cats wanted someone to say, ‘I’m not joining the military—they’re killing Muslims. What do they say at Dar Al-Hijrah about that? If you go to Dar al Arqam they’re laying it out, brother!’”

Awlaki had been happy in San Diego, but success was feeding

his ambitions. He had forged his own preaching career, in the face of his father’s skepticism, in Fort Collins and Denver. He had proven in San Diego that he could successfully run his own mosque. He was launching an audio publishing venture to reach a larger audience. And though he was not yet thirty, Dar Al-Hijrah was one of the nation’s biggest mosques, and its location in the Virginia suburbs of Washington would give Awlaki a chance to perform on a more prominent stage. The 2000 presidential campaign was well under way, and Anwar told his father that he supported George W. Bush, the Republican nominee, whose conservative social views matched his own. He even mused excitedly about the possibility that his new job as imam might win him an invitation to the White House. He agreed to start at Dar Al-Hijrah in January 2001 and left the San Diego job in June for an extended visit to Yemen.